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## **NIETZSCHE AND CHRISTIANITY**

### **Introduction**

Nietzsche levelled the accusation against Christianity that, following Plato, it strengthened man's conviction of the existence of two worlds: the wretched and the perfect, the earthly and the heavenly, the temporal and the eternal, in contradiction with the truth that each time it is my life which is an eternity<sup>1</sup>. As a result, man orients himself towards an abstract eternity, which is not the eternity of his life, forgetting about the latter. What is more, under the influence of the Protestant tradition in which God is more the harsh, just Old Testament judge rather than a God full of mercy, Nietzsche perceived Christianity in a distorted manner as a religion of guilt and punishment, judgement and accusation. Meanwhile, such a perspective runs contrary to the teachings of Jesus himself (see Luke 6, 37).

The leading theme of this article is not, however, the criticism of Christianity as a religion undertaken by Nietzsche. In analysing the relationship between the German philosopher and Christianity, I would like to focus on indicating Nietzsche's numerous links with the Christian tradition, and to briefly discuss the influence of the Protestant tradition on the very generalized view of Christianity we may observe from Nietzsche. Thus I do not want to concern myself with how Nietzsche assessed Christianity and what he thought of it, but rather: did he reason aptly, did he grasp it correctly. The task I have set for myself is a particular one, namely, it is to pin down which ideas of importance to Christianity appear in Nietzsche's work. It is not my ambition to determine whether he adopted them consciously, or whether it is only a coincidence; likely both answers are correct, that is Nietzsche drew inspiration from Christianity, if only to clearly separate himself from it in

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. [Filek 2014, 158].

some places, but it is not always a deliberate inspiration. What is more, I feel that we may risk the theory that Nietzsche poorly knew the Roman Catholic version of Christianity; he even read the Bible in its Lutheran translation, and perhaps if he had familiarized himself with Catholicism, his judgement of the Christian religion would have been entirely different. This, however, we can never know. Piotr Graczyk proposes a theological type of dialectic of Christianity, derived from an interpretation of the sense of the Easter *Triduum*. The author emphasizes distinguishing Good Friday Christianity, concentrated on suffering and empathy for the sufferer, from Holy Saturday Christianity, when Jesus descends into hell, and the absence of God is keenly felt on Earth, finally pointing to its "Sunday" strain, which affirms the world that recovers holiness and harmony, without renouncing contradiction and pain. The first, Friday Christianity is identified by Graczyk with the religiousness of Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Simone Weil; the second, gloomy, he associates with Protestantism. Finally, an affirmative Christianity, harmonically joining sadness and joy may be identified with Catholicism [Graczyk 2006, 38-52].

It is a fact that Nietzsche fights with Christianity, which does not prevent him from internalizing some Christian themes in spite of having a very superficial and incomplete picture of it. Meanwhile, as Protestantism balks before guilt, the body and time, Catholicism affirms them within certain limits. Nietzsche is disgusted by bourgeois morality joined with the facade religiosity, with an attitude whose core is a scrupulous and earnest, but mindless and ostentatious adherence to norms, contradicting the essence of Christianity. However, I would not like to create the impression that I am trying to persistently reconcile Nietzsche with Christianity, which is why I also mention the unquestionable differences in both doctrines such as the relationship to the issues of truth, compassion, transcendence, mercy and eternity. There are, however, a large number of common elements: praise for authenticity, creativity and freedom ("I love him who is of a free spirit and a free heart" declares Zarathustra), the ethics of dignity, the postulate of self-formation, appreciation of suffering, rejection of revenge and everything that is small and false, and finally, discipline of the will craving repetition as a confirmation of self, faithfulness to self.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The last of these make a proper identity, understood as constituting the unity of

## Two roots of European culture

It is commonly known how important the tradition of antiquity was to Nietzsche. Nietzsche is one of the most European philosophers in the sense that he is a son of European culture; he was formed not only by knowledge of Greek philosophy, history and art, the entirety of European art (particularly music), travel around Europe, but also to a significant degree by the Christian heritage.

Greeks discovered reason and its potency in discovering the world and man. One attribute of Greek philosophy is naturalism, a focus on the laws of nature. In contrast to it, supranaturalist philosophy, concerns spirituality.<sup>3</sup> Our culture thus has two roots: Greek and Semitic.<sup>4</sup> The Greek tradition based its knowledge on getting to know the world, while in the second, supernaturalist tradition, knowledge was a

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the personality, possible.

<sup>3</sup> It should be emphasized that, in the end, Christian philosophy (both patristics and scholastics) based itself on the Greek tradition, it did not disassociate itself from classic ancient philosophy; even if it was initially held to be unneeded, and even worthless, it soon began to accept it and creatively expand on it.

<sup>4</sup> A similar line of thought can be found in the works of Leo Strauss, who draws attention to the juxtaposition of the traditions of Athens and Jerusalem, the two pillars of Western civilizations. These are two antagonistic paradigms of wisdom, two different conceptions of rationality, two juxtaposed codes that cannot be reconciled: reason and faith, knowledge and revelation, seeking fundamental, universal rules by way of rational inquiry and acknowledging the primacy of transcendence understood as a secret, critical of incumbent truths vs. submission to authority. These two mutually-exclusive traditions also lead to two separate ethos of life; in the first, the primacy of thought is assumed, while in the second it is of action. Supporters of the cultural code inherited from Athens devote themselves to exploring the world and its truths, placing their hope in the potential of inborn reason, while the descendants of the Jerusalem tradition opt for faith and trust in the truth of religious revelation, humbly acknowledging its inaccessibility for human mind. Fundamentally, the aim of Strauss is to draw attention to the fact that the values of the Western world are often derived in part from the biblical tradition, in part from the Greek one. The tension between these two heritages is, however, invigorating and conducive to development. Thus there is nothing strange in the fact that the Nietzschean overman brings together the best of Jerusalem and Athens. In Strauss's opinion (and Nietzsche's himself), all religion, including Christianity, is the opposite of philosophy. Strauss perceived Nietzsche as the only philosopher capable of defeating Platonism. See Leo Strauss: *Political Philosopher and Jewish Thinker*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., Lanham, Maryland 1994.

consequence of faith, love for good was a condition of good, in accordance with this interpretation a good man is one who wants good, selects good, strives for good, overcomes himself. Nietzsche dislikes Greek ethic intellectualism. It is too trivial, it interjects man and his dilemmas into a simple and artificial schematism. What is more, in Semitic culture, particularly in the Roman Catholicism that grew out of it, the primary sense is that of hearing, while in the Greek culture it is sight. Zarathustra calls out repeatedly "He that has ears to hear let him hear!" [Nietzsche 1967, 294]. This is a clear reference to the Gospel of St. Matthew (Matthew 13:9).

European culture links faith with knowledge, Christianity compliments Greek culture with feeling. It does not run away from emotion and suffering as Greeks do. The first Christians, capable to love suffering, even clinging to it, were strange, alien and incomprehensible to the Romans. The Gospel of St. Matthew contains eight beatitudes, of which one of the first says "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." (Matthew 5, 3-10). The ethical ideal of the ancient Greeks was the wise man who led a reasoned life in accordance with nature. Freedom was apprehended as the understanding of necessity, power over oneself, distance, keeping control of one's emotions. The stoics formulated the norms of resignation, dispassion, *apatheia*.

And Zarathustra? He loves his students, he is not ashamed of tears; in the parable "Pilgrim", he cries bitterly from anger and longing for his deserted friends. Not the first nor the last time. In the final parable we discover about Zarathustra that "But his heart, was loosed, and tears dropped from his eyes and fell on his hands" [Nietzsche 1967, 438]. Do we find any picture of a crying Socrates? Zarathustra dares to call the Aristotelian golden mean a mediocrity [Nietzsche 1967, 282]. He declares that guilt and pain should be sought out. Zarathustra is accurately characterized as "the advocate of life, the advocate of suffering, the advocate of the circle!" [Nietzsche 1967, 328]. Finally – he does not hesitate at one of the climaxes to shout "The world is deep, Deeper than the day had been aware. Deep is its woe. (...) Woe implores: Go!" [Nietzsche 1967, 339].

Does Christ not encourage us to learn to love suffering, to accept it and to transform it into something greater? In Christianity, suffering is not a goal in and of itself, but something of significance, which can possess deep sense.

### **Say "yes" to suffering**

Of course, the matter is more complicated. In the parable "The Drunken Song", Zarathustra proclaims one important sentence: "joy is deeper still than grief can be" [Nietzsche 1954, 362]. An intriguing question arises: why is joy deeper than grief? Christianity emphasizes grief, thus deprecating pleasure. Defying this tradition of thinking about pain and joy as opposites, Nietzsche draws attention to the fact that they cannot be separated from each other, they are connected, without one and the other there would be no life. The nucleus of life appears through joy, life comes about in joy, and is then born in pain, which is present from the very moment of birth. As Józef Tischner wrote: „Giving birth is first of all an event of human life. It is connected to the experience of pain and at once to the experience of happiness” [Tischner 2005, 67]. Zarathustra repeatedly refers us to the postulate of giving birth to ourselves, and this must take place in pain, which is why the analogy with birth pains is unusually clear. Pain, however, is not a value *per se*, and giving birth to oneself is a long process.

According to Nietzsche he who concentrates on suffering desires to fade away. Essentially, people experiencing suffering wish to fade away, but they are inconsistent, as the choice may offer either a fading away of everything, or consent to the eternal restoration of everything; in the spirit of Nietzsche, one may not be selective in respect of life. He who focuses on joy says to the world, to life, to time "Last forever, return forever, be yourself forever". Meanwhile, everything that suffers does not want itself, renounces itself, and instead yearns to leave its descendants<sup>5</sup>. Joy, however, does not desire any descendants – it wants itself, it wants eternity, it is will in the form of a spring that triggers itself: "But joys all want – eternity! Want deep profound eternity!" [Nietzsche 1954, 365]. Pain, however, is breaking free to pass away, that is its nature, but if we agree to passing away then everything must pass away; if we negate pain, then we must negate everything. Joy is the other way around – it

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<sup>5</sup> It is again turning attention to the similarity of the theme of descendants mentioned in this parable and a fragment of the *Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* titled "Christians are Adopted Children of God": "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God ... and if children, heirs also, heirs of God" (Romans 8, 14:17). See also A. Szklarska, *Report from the ethno-anthropological seminar of 06.11.2013* (unpublished).

does not long to fade away; just the opposite, joy is something greater, all joy desires eternity. If we say “yes” to eternity, then in consequence we say “yes” to everything, which means that we also say “yes” to pain, because with Nietzsche all things are intermingles. North is south, pain is joy, night is sun, the wise man is a fool<sup>6</sup> The consolidation of opposites, saying “yes” to life, is grounded in accepting all aspects of life. The question may be asked whether higher men are called ‘failures’ by Zarathustra because they are unable to say “yes” to pain? For Nietzsche, who, after all, chooses joy, suffering as a part of life, of a greater whole, is possessed of an unquestionable sense. If we affirm everything, that includes suffering. A consequence of accepting the idea of eternal return is the observation that there is no way to cut oneself off from suffering, failure, despair. If we say “yes” to the here and now, we must accept that everything is linked by a chain of necessity, and we must therefore also say “yes” to pain. This does not change the fact that, according to Nietzsche, man’s task is to rejoice in life.

### **Two conceptions of time, two eternities**

Here I would like to make reference to the paradigm of eternity proposed by Nietzsche in the parable “Vita Femina” (known also as “The Second Dance Song”). Zarathustra conducts a romantic dialogue with life. Life is Zarathustra’s bride. In the next parable, “The Seven Seals”, life is identified as eternity. “For I love thee, O Eternity!” [Nietzsche 1954, 257] says Zarathustra repeatedly. But it must be clearly emphasized that what is understood in Christian culture to be eternal life has nothing in common with the life of Zarathustra, who addresses the eternity: “You”. It is not a matter of the eternity of underworlds, whose teachers were derided by Zarathustra. It is my life that is eternity. Thus, it is a matter of the eternity of this life, not eternity *per se*. “Thus Spake Zarathustra” is one long love song dedicated to this world. Zarathustra does not desire in the least to reach the heavenly kingdom, which, as Christ himself preached, is within the grasp of those who are like children, but as a gallant man, he desires “the earthly kingdom” [Nietzsche 1954, 355]. At the same time, he decides to accept that nothing passes irreversibly, that everything continues and eternally returns, every decision, choice, action or neglect remains with us forever, and in this sense

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<sup>6</sup> See: [Szklarska 2014, 175-176].

irretrievability is a mirage. Thus, we may not consider the things we are unable to take pride in and which are hurtful to remember as merely the distant past.

### **The postulate of self-formation**

Christianity, in spite of the capacity to wash away sins, also emphasizes responsibility for one's choices and their consequences, the importance of leading one's life consciously, self-formation, shaping oneself. In Christianity, man, who is fragile in nature, may be a hero of the spirit, conquering his own weakness, overcoming himself. The Nietzschean spirit of heaviness refers to something that happens in the lives of each of us, the existential discouragement, the letting go. The opposite of this state is the valour of being, the courage to struggle with adversaries, with temptations, with sloth, with laziness. In both philosophies we may essentially encounter the same fundamental postulate: self-improvement, continually striving to become better. John Paul II orders us to demand more of ourselves than others demand of us.

Many of Nietzsche's primary assumptions seem to be in conflict with Christianity, yet at the same time they arise out of it. In Nietzsche's opinion, everything that exists desires to retain its existence. The essence of reality is the will to live. Reason is in service to the urge to live, the irrational element. The aim of life is life itself, it has no objective sense. In Christianity, there is such a sense and it is tightly linked with transcendence. In Schopenhauer's conception, which heavily influenced Nietzsche, man experiences a continual absence, deficiency, his life is filled with suffering that results from the collision of urges. The essence of reality is will, but the will to power, that is not existence itself, but a strong, authentic existence. The will to power evolves, taking on an ever more perfect form. Nietzsche, similarly to Schopenhauer, remains under the influence of the conviction that the world is awash in tears and blood, and from this conclusion he determines that it is beautiful.<sup>7</sup> Power is spiritual power, it is the capacity to live as it wishes, the rejection of subservience to all external norms, it is the absence of fear in the face of fate. In Christianity, man's task is, in a sense, to subjugate himself to commandments, but it is not true that this should come from fear of the

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<sup>7</sup> See [Schopenhauer 2007, 5-18].

fires of hell and because of the law itself. Man is to live decently and nobly for his own good and out of love for God. He does this to retain his dignity and majesty, held so dear by Nietzsche. This allows man to look in the mirror and into the eyes of others without fear. All limitations that a Christian places on himself are voluntary, and are to help him live with dignity and without fear. He is aware that in life he can lose something greater than life itself, and if he fears anything, it is precisely this. He is not afraid of fate or of rejection by his surroundings, but rather of the loss of himself, his dignity and his greatness as a person capable of choosing, not guided by conformism and benefit but rather by love of God and of his fellow man.

In Nietzsche's opinion, man's nature should be expressed in instinctive, passionate, non-conformist, courageous action, in conduct not designed to please others and without regard for their acceptance. Both Nietzsche and Christianity are disgusted by Pharisaic hypocrisy, by living in falsehood, by the veneer of existence.

### **Pity, love, hate**

There is, however, one point that fundamentally distinguishes the two programmes from each other. Nietzsche was contemptuous of ethics, which viewed pity as a virtue. He felt that this was a humiliating attitude, and that pity is what keeps alive that which was headed towards death. On the other hand, the last paragraph of point 18 in the parable "Old and New Tables" points to a particular concern for a deteriorating, dying man. Zarathustra orders to keep dogs and insects away from the sick man, this attitude is in contrast to finishing off the weak. And yet Nietzsche attacked Christianity for its glorification of pity and for suppressing natural urges. He held life itself to be the highest goal. Christianity does indeed place great weight on mercy towards fellow men, and on empathy, understood as the pain of another in my own heart. Meanwhile, the character of pity is something different, it assumes comparing oneself to others, I help another out of pity because I feel I am better than he is, often humiliating him in the process. This is in no way the attitude promoted by Christianity. Zarathustra is aware that he who helps or who gives of himself must display delicateness and tact in order to avoid humiliating the beneficiary: "how much harder it is to give properly than to take properly, and that bestowing well is an *art*—the last, subtlest master-art of kindness," he declares [Nietzsche 1954, 301].



It is a fact that Nietzsche associated the crisis of 19th-century culture with bourgeoisie conformity, with a limitation of the natural, instinctive dimension of life and, as mentioned already, a mistakenly understood Christian morality. He believed in the triumph of the strength of the spirit over weakness. Weak people are afraid to be themselves, they hide behind norms, rules, crowds of people similar to themselves. When there appears on the horizon a brilliant, brave individual, he is immediately subjected to persecution and social ostracism. The fall of a man presenting a herd-like, slave morality is deep and final. Nietzsche, however, predicts the coming of an overman, more precisely – a superman, someone capable of going beyond himself, his weaknesses, constituting the personification of the will to power. This is a man capable of being authentic, of rejecting all that binds him: rejecting values that are out of sync with his hierarchy, decadent culture or religion, this is a man prepared for self-realization, even at the cost of social disapproval. A man must turn from a camel into a lion, and from a lion – into a child, for a child always does what it wants. When the spirit, whose transformations are described by Zarathustra, accepts ever greater burdens on itself with humility and obedience, it becomes a “pack spirit” – a camel. By refusing its own desires, it invites its own humiliation, and ultimately comes to perceive the entire monstrousness of its hump which it has been carrying and feeding, and which turns out to be something external, foreign, arriving in the form of a dragon of duties, with which the spirit desires to do battle. It is only at the moment of “I want” that the spirit becomes an untamed, wild, free lion who is lord of his own desert. Through the sheer force of his rapacity he is able to acquire the freedom to a new formation, to win the right to new values. Man thus has two paths before him: individualism (the choice of the strong) and conformism (undignified). Nietzsche is the eulogist of man’s authenticity.

But in no way does Christianity order us to make the choice in spite of ourselves, falsely, as long as we fulfil the commandments. Rather, it says “You can be great, you can be holy.” Not in the least does this mean that the key is a consistent and scrupulous adherence to codes. In both ideas the essential element is the postulate of self-formation, creative work on oneself. It is written in the holy book “Be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self,” (Ephesians 4:23-27).

The overman, the superman is such an ambitious task that only a very few attempt to meet the challenge. Here we have the fundamental difference, for with his trust in man Christ says that each of us can be holy if we wish. It is enough to love God and your neighbour, regardless of what he does to us. This is, of course, a very difficult task, but it is assumed that everyone is capable of succeeding. Nietzsche demonstrates a far more sceptical approach and expresses his conviction that very few are able to fulfil the postulates of Zarathustra and to understand his teachings. The idea of equality is, for Nietzsche, one of the most false ideas.

Regarding love for one's neighbour – it is worth recalling that in Zarathustra's view, the strong one is he who can refrain from hating enemies and from the thirst for revenge. This is the theme of the final fragment of "The Tarantulas" [Nietzsche 1954, 110]. Zarathustra himself falls prey to a poisonous spider. What is of the greatest importance in that moment is to refrain from taking revenge on the tarantulas. Zarathustra defends himself from the spirit of revenge. The spirit of revenge is, however, unusually strong, which is why Zarathustra calls on his friends to restrain him. Thus it becomes visible just how important guarding oneself from the spirit of revenge is. Revenge is nothing more than the compulsion to instrumentally take advantage of others. Nietzsche is contemptuous of such an attitude, which essentially boils down to manipulation in order to exploit and dominate others.

However, Nietzsche understands hate itself in a very particular manner. Indeed, he does declare that: "Ye shall only have enemies to be hated, but not enemies to be despised. Ye must be proud of your enemies" [Nietzsche 1954, 48] but what he has in mind is the fact that one should find a worthy and equal enemy who should mobilize us to become even better. As Nietzsche states, hatred of a mediocrity is unbecoming of a philosopher, and what cannot be loved should be avoided; this is preferable to wallowing in hatred like the embittered, cynical and hypocritical buffoon of "On Passing-By", who is only capable of criticism, contempt and exuding poison, and who cannot affirm himself nor fill his life with constructive content, with sense. Vituperation teaches hate – this is Nietzsche's view. This parable evokes the fragment "Hypocrisy" from the Gospel of St. Luke, which describes the case of a man criticizing the speck of sawdust in his brother's eye

while failing to see the beam in his own (Luke 6, 41-45). Zarathustra is disgusted by envy, and says that "He whom the flame of jealousy encompasseth, turneth at last, like the scorpion, the poisoned sting against himself" [Nietzsche 1954, 36]. Christ commands us to love our enemies, and Zarathustra appeals for love of the far and the farthest, as loving our neighbours is no great thing.

In one of his letters, Nietzsche remarks that to love oneself well it is necessary to practice loving others, as one's feelings towards oneself and towards others are closely correlated. Nietzsche believes in healthy love of oneself. In "Thus Spake Zarathustra", he shares the reflection that a healthy body may be burdened with the spirit of heaviness, or may be freed to soar by its own love.

### **Self-surpassing**

The key in understanding the Nietzschean category of the will to power is the concept of self-surpassing, that is a mechanism that directs and subjugates the drives of instinct; it also refers to maturity and spiritual growth. Self-surpassing implies a continuous desire to overcome oneself. This is also the primary postulate of Christian anthropology. In "Thus Spake Zarathustra" Nietzsche writes: "And life itself confided this secret to me: 'Behold,' it said, 'I am that which must always overcome itself (...) thus my will wills it.'" [Nietzsche 1967, 227]. The will to power means something along the lines of the will to subjectivity, to become an autonomous individual capable of creating and materializing values.

In Nietzsche's opinion, it is people themselves who create morality and law, they do not receive them from anyone. Man gives value to objects. It is only when creating value that man creates a world that makes sense. This is why he bears a tremendous responsibility: he encounters material which he then turns into things, and gives them meaning. What those things will be depends solely on him. Man is the creator. Without him, "the nut of existence would be hollow" [Nietzsche 1954, 61]. In the Gospel, man is also tasked with taming the earth and giving it sense, an example of which is the naming of animals in the Book of Genesis. Without man, the world would have no sense. For Nietzsche, creativity is never a painless activity: "Always doth he destroy who hath to be a creator" [Nietzsche 1954, 61]. Zarathustra teaches that while values are relative, in the sense that different people and different nations have

different values, they are absolute in the sense that everyone must select just one system and reject all others. This is why creating new values is always the destruction of old ones. In this sense, there is no innocent creativity.

Nietzsche writes about creating oneself that between the old, existing "I" of man and that which is to be created there is a strong tension. The creating man is contemptuous of that which drags him down. He defeats the spirit of heaviness, that is, it conquers what inclines him to sloth and what evokes disdain. This undoubtedly refers to a struggle for oneself. In Christianity, this battle has an equally dramatic nature, but there is something to draw on.

Zarathustra is returning to health, which means that he is returning to himself, returning home, assuming his destiny, he is *en route* to himself. This is not easy. He speaks on behalf of life and is the teacher of eternal return and the overman. And the overman himself – who is that? For sure, Nietzsche is not thinking of someone who possesses another constitution, understood as other conditions of life on earth, particular predispositions. Going beyond means seeking one's absent essence, finding it and fortifying oneself in it. Going beyond the present man is a bridge, a transition. It is not about striking out or deprecating the existing self. Zarathustra is a teacher, perhaps the most perfect among men, but he himself is not the over-man, the super-man. Nietzsche, in turn, is the one who analyses the essence of Zarathustra.

For Nietzsche, freedom has a positive character, it is not only freedom from, but primarily freedom to. As we can conclude from the parable "The Tree on the Hill", freedom is not something given, but it must be won, taken away from the prison of necessity and obligation that is the framework of obliging morality. Freedom is the will to power, that is, the will to create. In order for a man to self-surpass, he must free himself from the values forced on him by society. A free man is one who issues orders to himself, and who surpasses himself. The weak, who are not capable of doing that, need a morality imposed on them from above. The free man, however, can create it himself. Freedom can thus be achieved only by the strong. Freedom is associated with responsibility of the creator for what he creates. Nietzsche names the free man a warrior. In "Twilight of the Idols", he writes:

"And war educates for freedom. For what is freedom? That one has

the will to assume responsibility for oneself. That one maintains the distance which separates us. That one becomes more indifferent to difficulties, hardships, privation, even to life itself. That one is prepared to sacrifice human beings for one's cause, not excluding oneself. Freedom means that the manly instincts which delight in war and victory dominate over other instincts, for example, over those of 'pleasure'. The human being who has become free — and how much more the spirit who has become free — spits on the contemptible type of well-being dreamed of by shopkeepers, Christians, cows, females, Englishmen, and other democrats. The free man is a warrior. How is freedom measured in individuals and peoples? According to the resistance which must be overcome, according to the exertion required, to remain on top" [Nietzsche 1967, 541-542].

However, Nietzsche criticizes tendencies to manipulate the external environment in order to exploit it. Personal power directed towards the task of overcoming oneself is something entirely different. Not in the least does he mean the self-surpassing experienced by religious ascetics, in whose case it is difficult to speak of self-affirmation, but rather merely of repressiveness directed towards oneself. The idea is to creatively assimilate impulses for them to undergo a creative transformation and be uplifted. Nietzsche's thought should not be identified with a primitive naturalism. The ascetic not only extinguishes his impulses, but he also destroys creative energy itself. Yet it is impulses that are to awaken us, to constitute the stuff of a creative life. In Nietzsche's opinion, the saint turns upon himself that severity that is so closely allied to the instinct of domination at any price and which inspire even in the most solitary individual the sense of power.<sup>8</sup> Power (*Macht*) is something positive, it may even be said to be a type of sublimation, while the ascetic attitude expresses nothing but a conquering of oneself, which is effected through violence (*Gewalt*).<sup>9</sup> The will to power is never entirely satisfied. Nietzsche feels that Christianity, which presents itself as a personal blueprint of the ascetic saint, never experiences the authentic will to power in the slightest. But Nietzsche's image of Christianity is not entirely accurate, as Christian philosophy promotes an active attitude,

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<sup>8</sup> See [Nietzsche 2004, 78, paragraph 142]. In his earlier letters Nietzsche paints a picture of people as motivated by instinctual drives. However, he does not perceive overcoming as the elimination of individual drives, but rather holds them to be their creative and conscious sublimation.

<sup>9</sup> See more: [Golomb 2002, 19-46].

and the sacrifices that complement it have an entirely different aim and context. In Christianity, the point is not mortification, but rather a creative joy and appreciation for the riches given to us by God. For Nietzsche, the object of that love and infatuation is different, it is life itself, but the fundamental disposition is similar. Nietzsche puts life in God's place, but also treats it as a gift, which is attested to by the words of Zarathustra: "Thus wisheth the type of noble souls: they desire to have nothing *gratuitously*, least of all, life. He who is of the populace wisheth to live gratuitously; we others, however, to whom life hath given itself—we are ever considering *what* we can best give *in return*!" [Nietzsche 1954, 222]. There is a similarity between the Christian concept of love and the bestowing virtue of Nietzsche.

A symptom of the culture of contemporary man is that he is lazy, that he wants to do little. Let us recall the rage of Zarathustra: "Ye world-weary ones, however! Ye earth-idlers! You, shall one beat with stripes! With stripes shall one again make you sprightly limbs" [Nietzsche 1954, 231]. Meanwhile, modern man would prefer that a similar tepidity, sloth, and nihilism become something commonplace. He is afraid of the sort of attitude that is an authentic, responsible care for life and values that remain consistently strong. The ardour of others evokes a feeling of shame in him towards his passive attitude. Nietzsche, it is true, was not addressing values, but rather overcoming the spirit of heaviness, of nihilism, the attitude of the abnegator that destroys us and is expressed in the thought "everything is senseless, I desire to do nothing, I don't mind" when we are attacked by the monster of despondency. Christianity places a similar task before man, of overcoming his own laziness and weakness, to fight for himself and for the values that are important to us individually.

### **Nietzsche's mistake**

Nietzsche's interpretation of Christianity is inadequate in many places, and also inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity. Many examples may be cited, such as Nietzsche's making reference out of context to the Gospel of St. Luke, "Woe unto those who laugh here" [Nietzsche 1967, 405] as evidence that Christianity is a dreary, majestic religion, a religion of whining and gnashing of teeth, of unreflective devotion. Meanwhile, the God of Zarathustra would have to be able to

dance. In Nietzsche's opinion, people who are ruthless, with heavy hearts and legs, are not capable of dancing. Dance is expression, an expression of oneself; alongside dance, Zarathustra praises laughter which is the laughter of joy. And while Christianity is essentially a religion in which the crucified and crucifixion constitute the central figure, we are not allowed to forget that of greatest importance in this religion is what happened next, the surpassing of death, the emergence from the twilight, the triumph of hope and the joyful Hallelujah.

In order to demonstrate that Christianity is not only a religion that affirms suffering, but is primarily a religion of joy, I shall quote a portion of Psalm 98:

"Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth,  
burst into jubilant song with music;  
make music to the LORD with the harp,  
with the harp and the sound of singing,  
with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—  
shout for joy before the LORD, the King."<sup>10</sup>

Nietzsche, however, levels more charges. For the German philosopher, Christianity was a ban on thinking and the freedom of choice. The Nietzschean free spirit runs up against various interdictions, but none of them are capable of provoking such trepidation in him that he would waver or withdraw. As he says himself, "and if there is anything in me that is virtue, it is that I had no fear of any forbiddance" [Nietzsche 1967, 385-386]. Christianity is perceived through the lens of prohibitions and orders.

In Karol Wojtyła's "Love and responsibility", the fundamental prohibition of Christianity is presented, namely that a human may not be exploited, may not be treated like an object to be used. The most significant value is personal dignity. Is this the prohibition that Nietzsche fought? He battled with the form itself, *id est* the commandment, the external norm, but if he were to read more into the content of the prohibition, he would surely agree with it.

Truth in the epistemic sense is the analysis of a judgement. However, as emphasized by Tadeusz Styczeń, it is always someone who declares a truth. Personalist ethics, expressed *inter alia* in K. Wojtyła's "Person and Action", is dignitative; it assumes that personal dignity is

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<sup>10</sup> Psalm 98, *Praise to the Lord, Saviour of the earth*

the right of every individual and constitutes a criterion for assessing the moral value of an act, and it is also veritative. This last term indicates that it is an ethics of the normative strength of truth. The implication is that the individual who denies a truth that he himself previously declared and which was not forced on him commits a form of moral suicide. Assertion leads to acceptance. We must remain true to the truth, for otherwise we destroy our identity when we act contrary to that which we identify as important. This is the essence of evil.

In Nietzsche's view, the good do harm through their idiocy. Evil is spawned by their conceit and self-esteem. The good are those who think of themselves in that way, who are uncritical of themselves, veritable biblical Pharisees.<sup>11</sup> Yet with a sliver of sensitivity and reflexiveness, there is no way to have a clean conscience, a type of hypnosis. The criminals, in Zarathustra's view, are those who sleep soundly. He feels that the harm done by the good is the most injurious harm.

As Tadeusz Styczeń says, one of the fundamental norms of Christianity can be encapsulated in the sentence "The truth should be affirmed for its own sake", and "What I myself have declared, I may not deny."<sup>12</sup> A declaration of truth is morally binding upon the one who declared it. A truth therefore is not only informational, but also normative. Wojtyła emphasizes the experience of the normative strength of truth. There may be no talk of an individual's good intentions in a case when he possesses knowledge and fails to use it to prevent evil. Action is a condition of morality. Personalist ethics appears as normative anthropology. However, it can be applied as a universal ethics, for its norms are general. I may not deny a truth I myself have declared, but if I feel that I have erred, I may of course withdraw. For Heidegger, an untruth was treated like going astray. A personalist, however, would tell us "if I don't go astray, I acknowledge truth and my task is to remain faithful to it. But how can I be sure that I really did err in the past, that this new ascertainment is correct, that it is not because I want to withdraw from an uncomfortable truth but truth nonetheless?" In this approach, man and his conscience should not be the final instance. Christian ethics proposes to go beyond subjectivity, which is why a

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. [Nietzsche 1967, 324].

<sup>12</sup> Cf. [Styczeń 1993, 87-89].



foundation is necessary. Here we reach the primary difference between Nietzsche and Christianity, as for Nietzsche, man should not seek such clues and solutions outside himself. Nietzsche goes even further, posing curious and even more fundamental question on the value of truth, or rather – of justification for the will to truth. He provocatively asks us why we desire the truth, perhaps it is an untruth we truly desire; he also rejects the idea of truth's inherent value. Will to truth itself, for him, is the will to power in the sense that it is life, power, and not appropriateness or conformance with the thing that is the only value in differentiating the truth from false. Value for life, not whether something is or is not in agreement with the facts, turns out to be decisive.<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche proposes a reconstruction of the European mythical constellation in order to expel the concept of truth, and an external, timeless Absolute which are tightly linked with the Christian attitude towards the world based on the principle of empathy.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, there is no way to avoid passing judgement, this is an immanent human trait. It may be demonstrated that every judgement contains a semantic, logical, epistemic or informational element, but potentially a normative one as well. This may be demonstrated using even a trivial example. The sun rose today at 5:45. Let us assume that there are those who will tempt us by saying "I will give you a thousand dollars if you declare with conviction that this happened at 11:00." The truth, however, remains the truth; for the truth itself, nothing is changed by beginning to deny it. However, this violence turns against the individual who declares nonsense for money. Christianity says nothing more than faithfulness to the truth may constitute a norm.

In summary – we may speak sensibly about the truth in ethics. Ethical utterances may be viewed in terms of truth and false, they are sentences in a logical sense. But by no means are these truths imposed. The autonomy of the individual is of capital significance. Of the individual who ascertains the truth, which binds him until the moment when he recognizes that he has erred. The individual must discover this truth for himself, nobody will free him from this obligation, we may not

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<sup>13</sup> See: [Allen 1995].

<sup>14</sup> Often a link is assumed and demonstrated between Christian empathy and fundamental metaphysical figures, such as the absolute or the immortal soul. One example is the interpretation offered by Piotr Graczyk in the article: *Nietzsche a chrześcijaństwo*, (en. *Nietzsche and Christianity*) [Graczyk 2002, 29-44].

speak here of any dictate. Even if inspiration comes from the outside, this does not change the fact that I always declare the truth myself and accept it freely; it is not imposed on me in any way. Nietzsche was mistaken in linking Christianity with slavery.

Things have value, people possess dignity. We are capable of being moral creatures, which distinguishes us from animals. In personalist phenomenology, to affirm someone means first and foremost to see the person in him. Affirmation is also care to satisfy the needs of another person (this is, of course, an entirely different understanding of affirmation than that of Nietzsche). With Nietzsche, affirmation has a different character due to the fact that it is affirmation solely of this life and this world. Another fundamental difference is that affirmation in Christianity results in duty. This does not, however, mean the unreflective acceptance of external rules, but rather that if I concur with something and feel it is important for me, this must have its consequences. Nietzsche demands of the higher man that he be capable of engaging in battle with the dragon of duty that arrives from the outside. Meanwhile, for a Christian, what is binding is not what someone imposes on him, but rather that which he accepts of his own will.

### **Inspirations and references**

In the creative output of the German philosopher we find very many references to Christianity, some more, and some less literal. This is particularly visible in "Thus Spake Zarathustra". Let us cite some examples. Zarathustra feels that man swims about in puddles, inlets and shallows, so he should be dispatched out to the full sea. This gives us pause to think if we are not, by chance, living all the time in some monstrous restriction of our own selves. The sea is of course but a metaphor, it signifies a broadening of horizons, liberation, adventure, the sea is also time travel, it gives us a taste of eternity. As we know, Jesus was also supposed to set out on a boat with his disciples, an important motif in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Another example. In the parable "The Convalescent", an exhausted Zarathustra needs seven days to recover; Job also requires seven days and nights after his extreme experience before he can open his mouth. In the same vein, the supper to which Zarathustra invites his comrades is a reference to the last supper of Christ. Yet Zarathustra is

not the messiah who has come to put things right, as he himself renounces, responding to similar suggestions "Three times Nay!" [Nietzsche 1954, 323]. All he does is to share his wisdom and experience, as when he says "If ye would go up high, then use your own legs! Do not get yourselves *carried* aloft; do not seat yourselves on other people's backs and heads!" [Nietzsche 1954, 325]. This is exactly what the dwarf did in jumping on Zarathustra's shoulders. Nietzsche criticizes dependence, particularly of thought. He feels that if we are to acquire proficiency in conquering summits, acquiring courage, wisdom and strength, then only by doing it ourselves, from beginning to end, rather than to be carted to the top without our feet taking a single step along the way. And if man is unsuccessful? All the more, then: get to work, begin anew, do not despair, but rather let us begin by learning to laugh at ourselves.

Finally – in the last parable, "The Sign", we find many analogies to Christianity. What is interesting, in *Nachlass* the title of this parable is given as "Symbol". It is known that the symbol of Mark the Evangelist is a lion. The appearance of a lion may lead to associations with the appearance of the Messiah, with resurrection itself. It was believed in ancient times that lion cubs are stillborn, then animated with the roar of a lion. It is precisely the roar of a lion that is heard after Zarathustra plunges his arm into the shaggy hair of the predator. In the Bible, we find a bucolic image of a child who, upon arrival of the Messiah, fearlessly thrusts his hand into a viper's den. The Messiah restores natural harmony and peace to people. In the last parable there is also an allusion, as prior to exiting the cave Zarathustra girded his loins; this is a biblical expression, a symbol that someone has finally set out on his way.

After the lion's roar, Zarathustra understands his gravest sin, empathy with the higher man. Previously he was tempted towards empathy. Zarathustra understands empathy as a state of dependence on his disciples, and vice versa – the disciples themselves on Zarathustra. In this fragment we may find many analogies with the New Testament. When Jesus' disciples fell asleep following the last supper, he alone kept watch while they slept; the same can be seen here, as only Zarathustra is conscious. Christ was crucified, to be resurrected. And Zarathustra? He tells his disciples that when all of them have denied him, that is when he will return. Empathy makes independence, determination and

renouncement impossible, which is why it must be eliminated. The Saviour of the Gospels is always available to his disciples, he promises resurrection and his continual presence. Zarathustra does the opposite – he calls a moment of doubt concerning the abandonment of his disciples his last sin. The lion's descendants were to experience an awakening, a new birth upon his roar; but after that roar the higher men flee, they run away from Zarathustra, and regain their independence.

I could cite a whole range of other references, even very direct ones, to Christianity placed by Nietzsche in "Thus Spake Zarathustra".<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> One of the best examples is the parable "The Awakening" (ger. "Erwachen"). Interestingly, in Nietzsche's notes published as *Nachlass. Writings from 1884-1885*, the title "Resurrected" appears in relation to the tale. The action takes place after the psalms, in the evening, so it seems reasonable to ask why the title is "The Awakening"? This title is metaphorical, referring to a spiritual awakening; indeed, one can awaken from various states like lethargy, torpor, stupor. This tale is about a return to health, that is, an awakening from illness, coming to, rejuvenation, a situation in which someone suddenly rises, not necessarily from sleep. The protagonists of the parable awaken and begin to return health in the evening. When the psalms finished, a tumult arose in the cave; Zarathustra chose to leave, and returned later to speak to the animals. He remarks that the people in the cave are beginning to laugh, learning to laugh at themselves, which allows them to fight off the spirit of heaviness. This laughter precipitates their return to health. It is known that the spirit of heaviness constitutes a serious threat. The spirit of heaviness is Zarathustra's main concern. This threat hangs over man at all times. Man stands before the task of attempting to free himself from the spirit of heaviness. The spirit of heaviness is a name for something that overwhelms Europeans. Meanwhile, the point is to become playful, free, unfettered, to belong to oneself. To free the spirit from all of its prisons, from gloom, and to free oneself from unconsciousness. The ass's feast is killing with laughter, irony. Zarathustra's comrades learn to laugh at themselves. Zarathustra heals them with fortifying words, which leads to transformation of the various planes of their existence, desires and hopes. Particularly deserving of attention is the guests' prayer to the ass. While the ass is the tenth guest, he rather constitutes an object of adoration. The entire final fragment of the parable is full of biblical references, and even nearly-literal citations from the Gospel, such as the reference to the Revelation of St. John 7:12 "Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever." Other clear borrowings come in the phrases "bears our load", "the heart is patient", and the fragment from the Book of Wisdom "he who loves his son will not spare the rod", which Nietzsche changes to "he who loves his Lord will not spare the rod". What, however, is the sense in this parable full of allusions, sometimes with intentions reversed towards the Old and New Testament? This combination of citations gives an entirely new undertone. The symbolism of the ass himself is also of interest. One lead may be found in the interpretation by Gilles Deleuze, who draws attention to

They demonstrate that he was deeply inspired by Christianity, even though he usually distanced himself from it. These were not just meaningless references or provocations, a flourish of erudition or stylistic turns of phrase. If Plato's thought is thought from inside a metaphor, I thus dare to risk the thesis that the sensitivity and the majesty of Nietzsche, even if on many occasions he thinks in opposition to Christianity, fundamentally comes from the interior, the very depths of Christianity; but not the institutional Christianity, expressed in dogmas or external dressing, but rather from the message of man's summons to love, creativity and affirmation.

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the fact that the ass, like the camel, is a pack animal intended to bear as many loads as possible. In antiquity, the ass was first perceived as holy, but then took on a humorous significance and became an object of ridicule. Christ was presented with the ears of an ass. The image of the ass contains an ambivalence: valued for its utility and even irreplaceable labour, the ass was also held in disdain. In ancient Greece and for the Phoenicians, it had quite positive connotations. Dionysus rode an ass, judges of high social status rode asses, Jesus's ceremonial entrance on an ass into Jerusalem was a harbinger of his triumph. For a long time the Romans sacrificed asses to the god of fertility, but he was suddenly associated with the spreading and strengthening Christianity. From that moment on, Jews and the first Christians were scornfully referred to as worshippers of the ass. Deleuze had similar intuitions, that the traits of the ass were precisely the traits of Jesus.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **NIETZSCHE AND CHRISTIANITY**

The article presents connections between philosophy of Nietzsche and the Christian tradition. Author's considerations are not restricted to how Nietzsche assessed Christianity and what he thought of it, but rather: did he reason aptly, did he grasp it correctly.

It is a fact that Nietzsche fights with Christianity, which does not prevent him from internalizing some Christian themes in spite of having a very superficial and incomplete picture of it. There are unquestionable differences in both doctrines such as the relationship to the issues of truth, compassion, transcendence, mercy and eternity. Nevertheless they share a large number of common elements: praise for authenticity, creativity and freedom, the ethics of dignity, the postulate of self-formation, appreciation of suffering, rejection of revenge and everything that is small and false, and finally, discipline of the will craving repetition as a confirmation of self, faithfulness to self.

**KEYWORDS:** Nietzsche, Christianity, Zarathustra, affirmation, self-surpassing